

ILLUSTRATIONS IN JAINA MANUSCRIPTS *

In some academic circles Jaina *kathās* composed in Old Gujarātī have been deemed of minimal literary merit, as literature of limited sophistication — of interest restricted to their didactic nature, their treatment of folkloric themes or their linguistic features. An inspection of two typical *kathās* demonstrates otherwise. The evidence is found in several illustrated manuscripts of the [Dhanna-]Sālibhadda-carita ([Dhanya-]Sālibhadra-carita), composed in Sam. 1681 (1624 A.D.) by Matisāra (or Matisāgara) and one of the Dhanya-vilāsa of Sam. 1707 (1650 A.D.).

We need not dwell on the plots of these *kathās* or their themes, namely *dāna* « almsgiving » (and the fruits thereof). The first *kathā*, the Sālibhaddacarita, deals, in brief, with the tale of Saṅgama, a poor boy, a cowherd, who, given a dish of *khīr* (Skt. *kṣīra* « a pudding of sweetened rice and milk ») on the occasion of a holiday, meets a *muni* (a Jaina monk) ready to break his four-month fast. The boy who had looked forward so much to the enjoyment of this rare treat, offers without hesitation the dish to the *muni*, a perfect receptacle. The boy dies and is reborn the son of a wealthy merchant Gobhadda (Skt. Gobhadra), and his wife, Bhaddā (Skt. Bhadrā). He is named « Sālibhadda » and in the course of time marries thirty-two ladies of the best families. His father, reborn a god, lavishes untold wealth upon him and his wives. Sālibhadda wallows in luxury, unaware of life beyond the walls of his palace, until the king, Seṇika (Skt. Śreṇika), hearing of his remarkable life-style, decides to see this for himself. He goes there and, as a result,

* Data for this study were collected in part and worked while under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am pleased to have this opportunity to express my debt to the Endowment and my appreciation to the custodians of the repositories wherein the manuscripts repose for their kind permission to photograph them. They are the Narendrasingh Singhi family in Calcutta, the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, and the National Museum, New Delhi.

[Drawings by Mme. ODETTE MUKHERJEE].

Sālibhadda realizes that there is a master over him who, at a whim, can take everything away from him. There then arrives a *muni* who, in the course of his edification, assures Sālibhadda that he will have no master over him if he gives up his possessions — everything, everyone — and undertakes the life of a *muni*. Sālibhadda tells Bhaddā, his mother, of his decision. She pleads with him not to be rash, to take his time, to think about his household, his wives. He decides to give up his thirty-two wives, one a day. When Dhanna (Skt. Dhanya) hears this from Sālibhadda's sister, Subhaddā (Skt. Subhadrā), the favored one of his eight wives, he derides the « finality » of this awesome decision, to which Subhaddā and her cowives suggest sarcastically that Dhanna do likewise and to their consternation he does. He gives up his wives and wealth. He goes to Sālibhadda, persuades him to act decisively, and the two depart to pursue their careers as *munis* to the ultimate — *santhāro*, fast untō death.

In the second *kathā* the cowherd is reborn into a merchant family as Dhanna. He bests his brothers in mercantile trials: with the thirty-two rupees given him by his father (who had given the same sum to each of his brothers) he buys a ram with which he wins a prize of a thousand *dīnāras* by defeating the prince's ram; with sixty cowries he buys the bedstead of a recently deceased miser and discovers his treasure-hoard. Warned of his brothers' plot to kill him, he flees and goes to Rājagṛha where, in time, he receives Subhaddā as one of his wives. From this point the progression of the story-line patterns that of the Sālibhadda-carita, the first *kathā*, above.

An examination of the structures of the *kathās* reveals another dimension. Each *kathā* is divided into a number of *ḍhāls* (lit., « a pause, stop »), twenty-nine in the first and forty-three in the second. Almost every numbered *ḍhāl* is captioned with a *rāga*-title. The first or second stanzas of the *ḍhāls* often function as refrains. The overall effect, as I have proposed in an earlier paper¹, is that of a theatrical presentation, the various moods to be elicited from the audience in the course of the narration indicated by the *rāga*-titles with their implied melodies and the refrain-stanzas, maintaining the ambience of that section, recited by the narrator's assistants or repeated by the audience, thus heightening the effect. Furthermore, the form of narration is in the tradition of the *gāgariā bhāṭa* or *māṇa bhāṭa* as described by K. M. Munshi in his book, *Gujarāta and its Literature*².

The *gāgariā bhāṭa*, or *māṇa bhāṭa*, is peculiar to Gujarāta, and has played a great part in the evolution and preservation of this class of literature. He is the popular counterpart of the *purāṇika*, who,

1. E. BENDER, *An Old Gujarātī Dramatic Presentation*, in « Mahfil » [current title « Journal of South Asian Literature »], vol. 7 (1971), pp. 223-27.

2. K. M. MUNSHI, *Gujarāta and its Literature*, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, London, New York, Toronto, 1935, p. 117.

generally well-read in Saṃskṛta, recites the Purāṇas from the original to a select audience at his house, or at the house of his patron... But the gāgarīā bhaṭa is rarely acquainted with Saṃskṛta; he knows only the ākhyānas, or the Purāṇic episodes in Gujarātī verse which he has learnt from his teacher during his apprenticeship. He goes from place to place with a couple of disciples. His stock-in-trade is his ākhyānas, his tact, and his māṇa or gāgara, a large pot with a narrow neck from which he gets his name.

Wherever he happens to be, he opens his session at night on some temple door or verandah before a public square. With his nimble fingers loaded with brass rings, he starts playing upon the gāgara as on a hand-drum... The neighbourhood flocks to hear the kathā...; the public square in front and the windows of the surrounding houses are turned into an auditorium... The bhaṭa recites an ākhyāna; explains many parts of it; adds a flourish here, a touch there, to move or tickle the audience...³.

The illuminated manuscripts contribute another dimension to the story, fleshing it out, as it were. The painting styles of the Sālibhadda-carita MSs range from Rājasthānī to Moghul. I have selected two paintings from the Sālibhadda-carita and one from the Dhanna-vilāsa, the three illustrating a key incident in the story, i.e., when Sālibhadda and Dhanna are turned away at the gate of his mother's house in seeming contradiction to the asseveration of the ultimate *tīrthaṅkara*, Mahāvīra, that the two *munis* would break their month's fast at the hands of Sālibhadda's mother. However, on their way they meet a *mahīyārī*, a milk-woman who offers them the curdled milk she is carrying and, in this way, they break their fast. Mahāvīra then explains to them that the *mahīyārī* was Sālibhadda's mother of his previous existence. Mahāvīra's words were true.

3. It may be of interest to note that several years ago when visiting my good friend and colleague, Dr. Umakant P. Shah, I happened to describe to him my proposed identification of the Old Gujarātī *carita/ rāsa/ vilāsa/ caupāi* with a type of *gāgarīā-bhaṭa* presentation. Mrs. Shah remarked, to my delighted surprise, that she and their daughter-in-law were about to leave for the local Lioness Society where such an entertainment had been arranged for that afternoon. She invited me to join them and I accepted straightway.

The entertainment was starting as we entered the hall. At the front, clothed and turbaned in white, was seated the narrator on a dais covered with white sheets, in front of him a large metal pot with a narrow neck. He suddenly struck the pot with his heavily ringed fingers. The musician to his right softly tapped on his *tablā* and the one on his left joined in on his harmonium as the narrator chanted a stanza from a *Nala-carita*. He followed this with a brief commentary. And so the performance proceeded to its conclusion with round after round of the striking of the pot, joined by *tablā* and harmonium backing the chant of the narrator who, at times, traded humorous remarks with the audience, which, as far as I could tell in the low light, consisted for the most part of women.

In the first painting (fig. 1) from the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay⁴ the scene described above is simply depicted with the three principals set in profile against a yellow background. The *mahīyārī* stands on the left, facing the two *munis* whose habits and *muḥapattīs* (Skt. *mukhapatrī* « cloth for mouth ») painted in silver to indicate an off-white color mark them as of the Sthānakavāsī sect. The first muni, presumably Sālibhadda, has set down his white cloth bundle and accepts the curdled milk in a bowl which he holds in his right hand. The *mahīyārī*, dressed in a patterned red *sārī* over a lemon-green *cōlī* and horizontally blue striped skirt, pours the milk from a throated jar. Several upright leafed strands indicate foliage. The caption in Old Gujarātī reads: *Sālibhadra nu mahīyārī milī chai* (Sālibhadda meets a mahīyārī).

Figure 2⁵ as contrasted with the size of figure 1, which occupies a corner of a folio approximately 7 1/2"×4" in size, fills a page of size 17 1/2"×14 1/2". Even a cursory inspection of the painting recognizes the hand of a master painter and, indeed, it is, for the colophon gives his name, Sālivāhana⁶, identified as Ustād Sālivāhana of the court of Jahāngīr (1605-27 A.D.). The upper half of figure 2 is given to a representation of Mahāvīra's *samavasaraṇa*, with the figures of Mahāvīra in gold and that of his *vāhana*, the lion, in white. Below, at the right, in a rectangular space representing a boudoir in her palace is seen seated on a gilded *caukī* (« four-footed stool ») Bhaddā, Sālibhadda's mother who is preparing to welcome the Jinavara, Mahāvīra. A servant girl waves a white cloth over her head to dry her dampened hair, the main portion of which cascades down her back to well below her waist, the remainder falling over her right shoulder to curl under her breasts which appear free of the white *sārī* loosed to cover the lower part of her body. She gestures with her right arm to a servant girl standing before her who, with face and body turned toward Bhaddā, points with her right hand upward toward the center of the painting, announcing Mahāvīra's arrival. At the left of the painting, on a plane slightly lower than the scene described above, facing right sits a bearded gate-keeper in his booth. He wears an azure blue *sherwānī* (long coat) tied at the waist with a white sash; on his head is a flat, white turban. His right hand grasps a *lāṭhī* (« staff »), the length of which rests along the right shank of his orange-hued trouser leg. Not recognizing them, he had turned away the two *munis* who, attired in Śvetāmbara habit⁷ — white

4. MS no. 51.23, Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay.

5. Narendrasingh Singhī Collection, Calcutta.

6. See N. C. MEHTA, *Studies in Indian Painting*, Bombay, 1926, pp. 69-73; P. NAHAR, *An Illustrated Salibhadra MS*, in « Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art », vol. 1, no. 1, 1933, pp. 63-7; P. CHANDRA, *Ustād Sālivāhana and the Development of Popular Mughal Art*, in « Lalit Kalā », no. 8, 1960, pp. 25-46.

7. But the *munis* may have their *muḥapattīs* over their mouths (It is not clear.) — a Sthānakavāsī feature. Moreover, the two appear to be wearing *cūḍas* (« a lock of hair left on the head after tonsure ») which is not a Jaina custom.

with a yellow over-shawl —, are seen below meeting the *mahīyārī*, who is emptying the contents of her cylindrical vessel into Sālibhadda's jar-shaped bowl while Dhanna stands aside holding two staffs in his right hand, his and that of his ex-brother-in-law.

The Dhanna-vilāsa manuscript⁸ displays a *laukik* form, refined and brought to maturity by a skilled craftsman. The scene, fig. 3, contains on the left Sālibhadda and Dhanna, facing right toward the *mahīyārī* who is pouring from her shallow-container into a large black jar sitting on the ground. Two other round, decorated jars rest on a flat footed tray. The *munis* are garbed in yellow and carry the bare necessities — staff, whisk, bowl and *muḥapattī*. The first *muni* gestures with his left hand toward the *mahīyārī*, the quality of whose attire is well beyond that of the usual milk-maid. Over a green *cōṭī* and skirt she wears a patterned brown *sārī*, its red border gathered into pleats at her waist. On her throat and forearms are necklaces and bangles; massive, round earrings hang from her ears and on her forehead rests a large gem with pendant pearls. Two pearls dangle from her nose-ring. The space between and over the *munis* and the *mahīyārī* is filled with the curling, twisting branches of a tree among whose studded blossoms perch and flit doves and parrots, while, at its base, following with its eyes the stream of milk from the *mahīyārī* dish to the jar waits in anticipation a cat.

We cannot leave the Dhanna-vilāsa manuscript before discussing a curious painting (fig. 4) — curious in that it does not illustrate any incident in the story. On the right hand half of the painting, against a meadow-background, is seen a mustachioed figure with a *vinā* over his right shoulder. He wears a patterned red sherwānī, sashed at its waist. His *pājāmā* (« trousers ») are bluish grey, as is his turban, and on his feet black, decorated shoes with pointed toes. As he moves along, he looks back over his right shoulder at the four deer — three black and one tan — which are following him. The deer sport on their necks tasseled, metal collars.

A curious painting, indeed, but we cannot leave it at that. Except for the man, the painting contains the characteristics of a Todī Rāgiṇī — i.e., a young woman carrying a *vinā* and accompanied by four deer — and cannot avoid comparison with rāgiṇī paintings such as that of figs. 5 and 6⁹. Note that one of the four deer in fig. 5 is tan and those of fig. 6 wear tasseled collars. Furthermore, in view of the bits and pieces of verse which accompany the rāga-captions in these Old Gujarātī texts, one cannot but conclude that these texts exhibit the traces of a rāga-tradition.

8. MS no. 51.230, National Museum, New Delhi.

9. For fig. 5, see A. L. DALLAPICCOLA, *Rāgamāla Miniaturen, 1475-1700*, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 212, no. 1517; for fig. 6, see W. G. ARCHER, *Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, London, New York, 1973, 2 vols., plate 77.



O.M

Fig. 1: Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay.

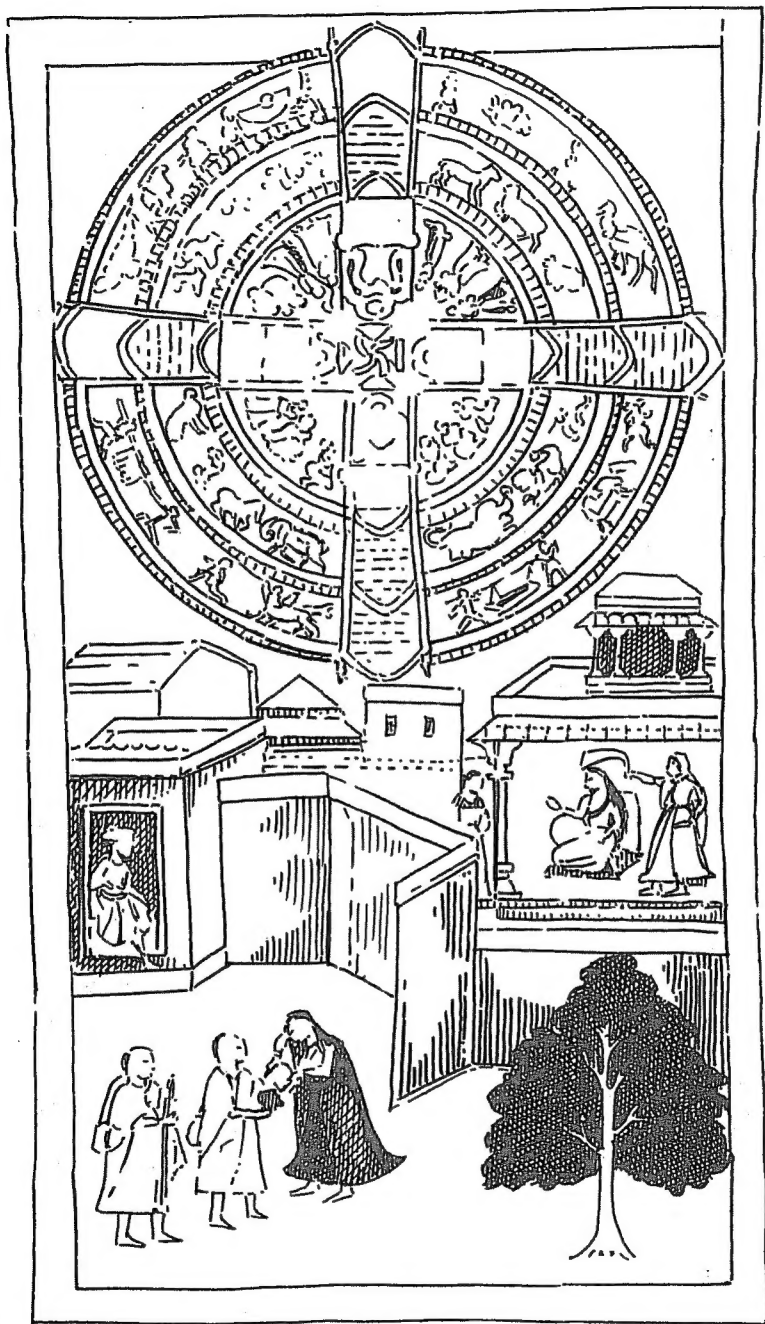


Fig. 2: Narendrasingh Singhi Collection, Calcutta.

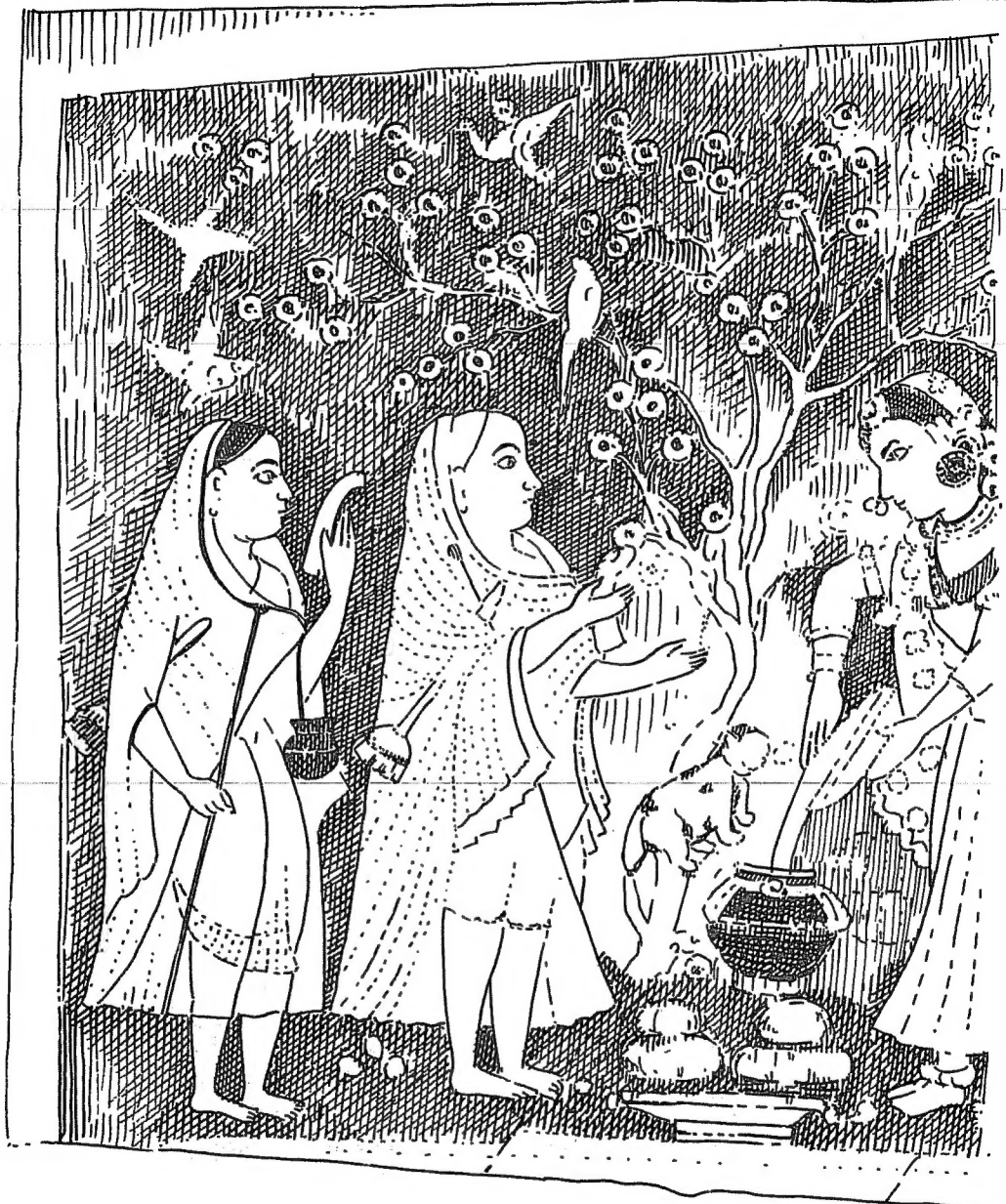


Fig. 3: National Museum, New Delhi.



O.M

Fig. 4: National Museum, New Delhi.

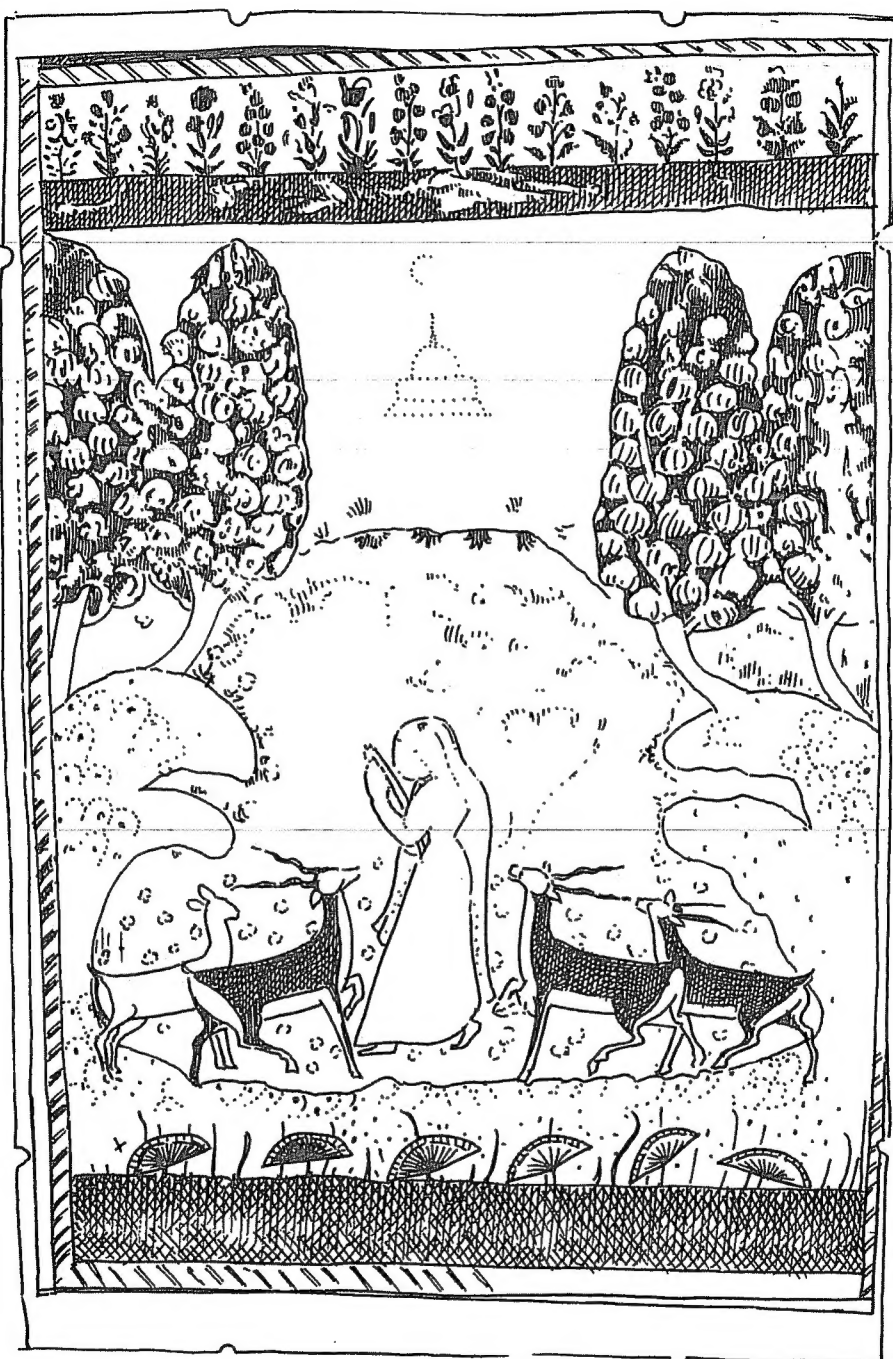


Fig. 5: From A. L. Dallapiccola, *Rāgamūla Miniaturen*.



O.M

Fig. 6: From W. G. Archer, *Paintings from the Punjab Hills*.